

Young People’s Attributions of Privacy Rights and Obligations in Digital Sexting Culture

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Youth sexters are considered vulnerable to privacy violations in the form of unauthorized distribution, in which sexts are distributed beyond the intended recipient without the consent of the subject. This article draws on group and one-to-one interviews with young people 14 to 18 years of age living in southeastern England to show how they constructed privacy rights and obligations in sexting. The analysis suggests that their constructions were shaped by individualistic orientations to risk management, social meanings of privacy in the “digital world,” and broader norms and values regarding gender, trust, and approved conduct of behavior in intimate relationships. The article concludes that educational and community interventions on sexting with young people should deconstruct and challenge narrow ethical frameworks regarding privacy rights and obligations, and young people’s tendency to blame and responsabilize victims of privacy violations in sexting.

Keywords: sexting, privacy, youth, technology, gender, trust

“Youth sexting”—the digital production and exchange of personal sexual images and messages among young people younger than 18 years—continues to attract public concern, media attention, and research and policy focus (Crofts, Lee, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2015; Hasinoff, 2015). Over the years, this focus has shifted somewhat from the victimization of young people by predatory adults to sexting practices among teens in their peer groups (Moran-Ellis, 2012). Anxiety about youth sexting relates particularly to the risk of unauthorized distribution, in which sexts are circulated beyond the intended recipient without the consent of the subject (e.g., among peers or on social media). In public discourse—including among politicians, policymakers, and campaigners, some academic researchers and media commentators, and those tasked with educating and protecting young people (e.g., teachers and police)—unauthorized distribution is considered a probable, even inevitable, consequence of youth sexting. Thoughtlessness, impulsivity, and hormone-driven risk taking are assumed typical of adolescence, and as making it likely that young people will distribute sexts of one another for social gain (see Simpson, 2013). Unauthorized distribution is linked in both the public imagination and some research on youth sexting to psychological, social, and reputational consequences, including bullying and harassment by peers and exclusion from employment and educational opportunities (see Crofts et al., 2015; Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Döring, 2014; Hasinoff, 2015). Young people’s sexting practices, therefore, tend to be interpreted as evidence of their naivety and lack of consideration of privacy (Moran-Ellis, 2012; Simpson, 2013).

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Research exploring young people's perspectives on sexting suggests that they are aware of and concerned about the potential for unauthorized distribution (Albury, Crawford, Byron, & Matthews, 2013; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012). However, although they seem preoccupied with the risk of unauthorized distribution, perhaps because it is socially visible and impactful, evidence suggests that it is not an inevitable consequence of youth sexting (Crofts et al., 2015). Surveys asking youth sexters about their experiences reveal that unauthorized distribution affects a minority of respondents (e.g., Englander, 2012; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012; Strassberg, Rullo, & Mackaronis, 2014). However, this minority may be substantial, and privacy violations can be unequally felt and lead to social shaming and other harmful consequences. Ringrose et al. (2012), for example, found that social norms and cultural practices of sexism and objectification of young women in youth peer, sexual, and relational cultures are implicated in privacy violations (also see Setty, 2018).

It is suggested, therefore, that unauthorized distribution and its consequences are socially constructed and shaped by social norms and meanings that make (some) sexts valuable in the peer group, and so promote distribution and the social shaming of "exposed" sexters (Angelides, 2013; Crofts et al., 2015; Hasinoff, 2015). Consequently, understanding and preventing privacy violations may require a reorientation away from constructions of them as inherent to digital communication technology to how young people understand and navigate privacy in sexting within their situated digital, peer, relational, and sexual cultures (Hasinoff, 2015).

Young People, Privacy, and Sexting

Developments in digital communication have implications for privacy, notably in terms of "tracking and monitoring," "aggregation and analysis," and, with particular relevance to sexting, "dissemination and publication" (Nissenbaum, 2010). Marwick and boyd (2014) suggest that the digital world draws together disparate audiences to produce "networked publics" in which information is "replicable," "searchable," "spreadable," and "persistent," and so can travel to broader, unintended audiences. Given these challenges and risks, Marwick and boyd found that young people use technology innovatively to achieve "privacy management," in which privacy is not about keeping everything to the self, but trying to control the depth and breadth of information shared, and the level of intimacy in relationships and connections with others (also see boyd, 2012; boyd & Marwick, 2011; Joinson, Houghton, Vasalou, & Marder, 2011; Livingstone, 2008).

Privacy is, however, tied up with others in the "network" rather than being entirely within individual control. Marwick and boyd (2014) suggest that technical explanations of privacy obscure how others are partly in control, for example, by being able to share one's content. Given this "social" element of privacy, Hodkinson (2015) queries the extent to which what individuals encounter in the online world is different from what they encounter offline. As privacy is, somewhat, achieved through social negotiation as to how information is handled, Hodkinson suggests that individuals rely on trust and interpersonal relationships, as they do offline. He contends that broader social norms and meanings shape technological practices regarding privacy.

The interrelationship between offline norms and online expectations has been conceptualized by Nissenbaum (2010). She suggests that privacy is about keeping material within the intended "context." She argues that individuals share information about themselves in different contexts that have different norms regarding how information should be treated. She describes privacy violations as breaches of these "context-relative information norms." Although technology poses challenges to keeping information within intended contexts, Nissenbaum argues that preexisting norms and standards about the flow of information shape privacy expectations and rights in the digital sphere. These norms and standards create scripts for action and practice, within specific contexts. Rather than being caused by technology, privacy violations are, therefore, social actions that breach established norms and standards. Essentially, just because information could be stored, replicated, and distributed does not mean it should and is not deserving of privacy (Solove, 2007).

Applying Nissenbaum's (2010) arguments, Hasinoff and Shepherd (2014) explored the translation of wider systems of meaning and norms to expectations and standards of privacy in sexting. Their research with 18- to -24-year-olds revealed a continuity of offline norms and expectations in their attitudes toward privacy and sexting. Their participants perceived sexual communication as inherently private, and believed privacy violations are inappropriate and unacceptable. Their participants considered sexting an indicator of trust and, consequently, believed that individuals should know it is private. Nevertheless, victim blaming persisted regarding privacy violations, as participants considered it the subject's choice to engage in sexting. Although believing individuals should respect one another's privacy, participants felt the subject should take responsibility for any consequences of unauthorized distribution.

Although norms shaping attitudes toward digital privacy may not be that different from those in the offline world, technology can challenge expectations of privacy, and Hasinoff and Shepherd's (2014) findings suggest that individuals favor individualized notions of responsibility for privacy management and blame for violations (also see Hasinoff, 2015). Hasinoff and Shepherd note, however, that research is required to explore perspectives on privacy and sexting among younger people. Previous research suggests that teenagers are concerned about unauthorized distribution, but they also engage in victim blaming in which subjects of sexts are perceived as responsible for harmful consequences of sexting (Albury et al., 2013; Bond, 2010; Coy, Kelly, Elvines, Garner, & Kanyeredzi, 2013). However, less is known about the norms and meanings regarding appropriate flows of information and, therefore, attributions of privacy rights and obligations in sexting among young people. In other words, they may engage in victim blaming, but what underpins this blame and shapes who is considered responsible and who is absolved?

The research on which this article is based explored practices and perceptions regarding sexting among young people 14 to 18 years of age. This article discusses their attitudes toward privacy in sexting, in particular, their constructions of privacy rights and obligations. I therefore extend Hasinoff and Shepherd's (2015) focus on young adults to teenagers. Previous research exploring privacy with teenagers reveals that a pervasive individualism shapes their constructions of privacy rights and obligations in digital environments (Marwick, Fontaine, & boyd, 2017; Vickery, 2015). An important contribution of this article is to explore the social meanings and cultural norms that shape young people's constructions of privacy rights and obligations in sexting. Previous research suggests that individualistic orientations to privacy are underpinned by broader structural inequalities and disadvantages (Marwick et al., 2017; Vickery, 2015). The findings discussed here

reveal how participants attribute blame and responsibility for privacy violations in sexting and the wider sociocultural context shaping these attributions.

Research Aims and Questions

I took a "rights-based" approach to youth sexting, in which I considered sexting a normal form of intimate communication and sexual and bodily expression (Döring, 2014). I considered young people entitled to freedom from harm, including unauthorized distribution of their sexual images and messages (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Döring, 2014; Livingstone & Mason, 2015). I aimed to reveal the social meanings underpinning harmful sexting practices, including unauthorized distribution. The following questions guided my approach and analysis of young people's perspectives on privacy:

- How do young people construct privacy regarding digital communication technology generally and sexting specifically?
- How do they construct and attribute blame and responsibility for privacy violations in sexting?
- What are the social meanings, norms, and values shaping these constructions and attributions?

Method

The research involved qualitative group and one-to-one interviews with 23 boys, 16 girls, and two young people identifying as gender-fluid; all were between 14 and 18 years of age. I recruited participants from a school and youth clubs across a county in southeastern England. All identified as being from a White background. Twenty-nine described themselves as heterosexual, five as gay/lesbian, three as bisexual, two as pansexual, one as biromantic asexual, and one did not specify. Most reported not having a disability, although three stated that they had a physical disability, six a mental disability, one a learning disability, and one a sensory disability.

I held nine group interviews with between three and seven participants each. The group interviews explored participants' use of technology, meanings, and understandings of the "ethics" of sexting and practices and perceptions surrounding sexting. I then invited participants to a one-to-one interview, and seven interviews were held with four girls and three boys.¹ These interviews were a two-way conversation in which participants shared personal beliefs and experiences of sexting. I took a symbolic interactionist approach to the research and analysis (see Blumer, 1969). The interviews uncovered how these young people constructed meaning in sexting, and how meaning shaped perceptions, practices, and self-concepts (see Charmaz, 2014; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

I was guided by the grounded theory approach to analysis, with the aim of foregrounding participants' perspectives (see Charmaz, 2014). I engaged in close reading of the interview transcripts, coding line-by-line, building up from description to interpretation. I compared data across participants and research methods, and noted contradictions and continuities. An a priori literature review helped me develop

¹ These interviews were held with young people at the school. Gatekeepers at the youth clubs did not consent to young people being interviewed in a one-to-one setting.

a full picture of young people's social worlds (see Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2014). In the analysis, I searched not just for affirmation of existing knowledge, but also for new ideas, and I was interested in how different concepts in the literature were expressed and experienced by participants. I interrogated each research encounter shortly afterward and used the emerging findings to inform subsequent data collection.

Results

Most participants distanced themselves from sexting because of the risk of unauthorized distribution. Their low expectations of privacy were rooted in their constructions of the nature of communication technology. Although participants showed little desire to stop using technology to communicate generally, regarding sexting, restrictive discourses emerged around blame and responsibility for privacy violations. Participants responsabilized themselves and others to manage the risks posed by technology. They demarcated "deserving victims" from "undeserving victims" based on sexting contexts. Young men who sext as part of more "casual" encounters, compared with those in "trustworthy, committed relationships," were denied a right to sext and expect privacy, as were all young women, who were perceived as being at risk of privacy violations and, therefore, responsible for abstaining from sexting to protect themselves from harm. Participants' individualized discourses of risk management thus interacted with normative judgments about gender, sex, and relationships, and underpinned their constructions of rights and responsibilities in sexting and, therefore, victim blaming for privacy violations.

Perceptions of Sexting and Risk of Privacy Violations

Participants were aware of sexting, with many describing it as a "new norm" and widespread among young people. Bond (18, M), for example, remarked that he "wouldn't say it's the normal thing to do per se, but that it has become the norm of this generation." Perceptions that youth sexting is a new norm does not necessarily mean that all young people are engaging in the practice and, of the 41 participants, eight girls and one boy spoke of having created and shared images with actual/desired partners, friends, and/or acquaintances, although because sexting is a socially stigmatized practice, this may be due to underreporting (see Crofts et al., 2015; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). As Bond's comments intimate, despite considering it a new norm, most participants were cautious of condoning or associating themselves with sexting as subjects because, as discussed below, of the perceived risks involved. Many, however, spoke of having been recipients or "bystanders" when they were told about, shown, or sent images of others, or viewed images posted to social network sites. Sexting was, therefore, normalized in their peer contexts.

Participants mainly described their initial awareness of sexting as stemming from vicarious experiences involving peers, media coverage, and school interventions (see Crofts et al., 2015; Dir & Cyders, 2014). Typically, awareness followed a "big incident" of sexting, in which an image was "leaked" and became "common knowledge" in the peer group. Although they described such incidents as socially significant and impactful, they felt that widespread unauthorized distribution was quite rare. They nevertheless considered privacy violations likely, even inevitable. They perceived privacy as "potentially up for violation," and this potential shaped perceptions of risk and a lack of control. Chris (16, M) remarked that sexting means that "they just hand the other person their privacy, and then the other person will do what they want with . . . [their] privacy." This risk meant most distanced themselves from sexting, and vicarious experiences of

unauthorized distribution worked as cautionary tales. Negative perceptions were, therefore, related less to sexting itself but more to the potential for distribution:

I think if people want to they want to, but I wouldn't advise to doing it . . . if something goes wrong, like if you're messaging a boyfriend/girlfriend sexy images or something . . . and then you break up, stuff can happen. People get annoyed, people don't think clearly, all that kind of stuff. So, I wouldn't . . . recommend doing it. (Jessie, 15, F)

Most participants considered abstinence from sexting a prudent form of risk management. Ben (16, M) felt this was the "mature" position and distanced himself from those he considered more reckless. Although Ben was concerned about unauthorized distribution, he also considered sexting to pose a threat in terms of broader social values. Others seemed less concerned about the "morality" of sexting. They felt that individuals can do as they like, but should be aware of and willing to accept any negative consequences that arise (see Bay-Cheng, 2015). However, as the extract below suggests, the riskiness of the loss of privacy in sexting was related to the social and reputational damage that can result:

Interviewer: When it's sexual pictures, is it [privacy] different?

Becky (15, F): Harder, harder to keep private.

Brian (15, M): It depends who it is. You could easily keep it quiet, if it's not sent to someone who will spread it about, like you can easily keep it secret.

Becky: It's better not to risk it though, because in this society you've seen it happen to other people, you've seen what it's done to their lives.

Brian: Especially what it's done to this generation we're more like, we're more sent pictures and like we'll feel the consequences of that.

Such consequences were not evenly distributed and, therefore, neither were privacy rights and obligations. Individuals may have been able to do as they wish, but were operating within a context in which sexual and bodily expression held intense meanings and, therefore, actions and practices were intensely scrutinized. I now discuss participants' abstract, individualized constructions of risk management, before exploring how these judgments were normative and gendered, and fell more on particular young people, including those who sext in "casual" relationship contexts and young women.

Responsibilization Amid an Unequal Terrain of Risk

Participants attributed their low expectations of privacy in sexting to the nature of digital communication technology. They conceived of technology as offering little sense of privacy. Initially, they conceptualized privacy as only applying to information about the self that is not shared. Given, it is argued, that digital communication technology requires sharing to permit meaningful identity exploration and sociality, they considered such communication inherently not private (boyd & Marwick, 2011; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011; Walther, 2011). However, they later suggested that privacy is not about not sharing at all, but controlling what is shared and with whom, hence the concern over unauthorized distribution, which breaches this control (see Livingstone, 2008).

Simon (15, M): Privacy just means that you don't have some like random person. . . .

Kyle (16, M): It means you can choose who . . . sees your pictures and stuff.

Participants described valuing privacy for its own sake, and expressed concern about "digital crowding" and "audience segregation," in which they struggle to maintain the boundaries between their social worlds (boyd & Marwick, 2011; Joinson et al., 2011). They perceived a lack of ownership and control over what they create and share, described self-regulating by considering how content may appear if reproduced outside intended settings, and responsabilized others to consider the implications of a loss of privacy (Debatin, 2011). Participants also, however, conceptualized privacy violations as "social actions," chosen and taken by individuals. Their attitudes to privacy were, therefore, not just rooted in beliefs about technology, but also social and cultural meanings, norms, and value systems.

It is suggested that there is an ethical dimension to meeting the demands of responsabilization and effective self-management, which shapes how individuals are judged and treated (Harrison, 2012; Rose, 2001). Participants expected individuals to conform to certain standards; otherwise, they were denied status, in this case, having their privacy breached and being entitled to "deserving victim" status. This orientation meant that the social actions of maintaining or breaching another's privacy were not the focus of participants' discussions. Participants' emphasis was on whether individuals experiencing privacy violations were considered to deserve recognition and the response they were given (Solove, 2007). They tended to believe that recipients of sexts should not distribute them without the consent of the subject (see Albury et al., 2013). However, whether an individual was considered to have a legitimate claim regarding a privacy violation depended on the sexting context, in particular, what is produced, and by and between whom. These judgments were normative and shaped by systems of meaning, cultural norms, and perceptions of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" sexting, and, therefore, responsibilities for risk management.

Trusting Relationships Versus "Risky" Casual Sexting

The "social" element of privacy meant that participants described "trust" as integral to achieving privacy (Marwick & boyd, 2014). John (17, M), for example, felt that "whole aspects of the Internet . . . [are] completely about trust." Participants described predicting and accounting for how material may appear outside intended settings, and they emphasized establishing not just "what" should be shared, but "with whom." Participants felt that what they share may not "technically" be private (e.g., one-to-one messages), but they also felt that individuals should understand and treat what is shared as private as it is intended only for that particular setting (see Nissenbaum, 2010). Participants thus perceived a level of social or psychological privacy online, despite a lack of informational privacy, based on expectations of the information being handled correctly (Trempte & Reinecke, 2011).

Participants felt that individuals should make sure that they trust those with whom they are sharing their information enough so that they can reasonably expect that their privacy will not be breached. Their presumption was that certain individuals could be trusted to share their expectations:

I've never had people . . . post bad things about me, because I feel like the friends I have aren't that type of people, like they're okay about it . . . they're the kind of people who could post something and you could be like, no, take it down, and they'd be like, ooh okay, sorry. (Charlie, 17, F)

This emphasis on trust shaped participants' attitudes toward those who experience privacy violations in sexting. They felt that if sexters engaged in sexting in a context of trust, they would have a realistic expectation of and right to privacy because they should be able to expect that just because their sexting partner could share their images, they would (and should) not do so. Within these contexts, it was considered immoral and unethical to breach another's—well-placed—trust by sharing their sexts without consent:

Let's say you're with a girl for a month, four months, six months, a while, maybe a year, and at the end of the day, I . . . wanted to start sharing pictures, because you trust her enough, then I see that as okay, even if it was . . . leaked out to everyone . . . I wouldn't blame the person for it. (Chris, 16, M)

Participants felt that the context in which a person has a legitimate entitlement to privacy based on trust was a "committed relationship." Participants believed that these contexts are inherently private because social norms mean that consequential information can be shared to build intimacy and connection (see Misztal, 2012; Nissenbaum, 2001). They considered committed relationships sacred and deserving of respect; thus, they accorded a right to sext in these contexts (see Crofts et al., 2015):

Jessie (15, F): If you're in a married relationship with another guy, like two people are happy and have been living together for like 20 years, and there's no prospect of them breaking up in the future, ever, it's pretty much happy ever after situation, they have kids, blah, blah, blah, and if they decide that that's what they want to do, then they can go ahead and do it. As long as they trust the other person and everyone's consensual, then I say go for it, have fun. It's not my point to judge.

Leo (15, M): Surely, if you're married, and you can't wait long enough for them to return before you just start sending sex pictures. . . .

Jessie: Well, like I know there are . . . relationships where some people, like a lot of my family work on the Navy, so they went far away for long period of time and that kind of stuff.

Leo: That's fair enough then.

Similar beliefs were held among those who were more disdainful of sexting. Ben (16, M) conceived of it as acceptable that some of his friends sext because "they really get along and we can see that . . . we know they would never break the other one's trust, because they really do trust each other intrinsically." There was a circular logic here. Participants considered trust self-evident and as providing certainty, because of the meanings participants held about the sanctity of committed relationships. Maintaining privacy depended on establishing trust, and committed relationships were defined as involving trust, and so were considered inherently private. In these contexts, participants considered the distributor to have failed to have met expectations based on the importation of offline norms and standards regarding the "betrayal" (Gary, 15, M) of trust that privacy violations represent in committed relationships (see Barrigar, 2013; Hodkinson, 2015).

Trust was, however, a fluid concept that can change over time (see boyd & Marwick, 2011; Solove, 2007). Participants discussed how trust can disappear if sexting partners have an argument or break up:

Brian (15, M): And the next couple of weeks you break up, then they could. . . .

Becky (15, F): They could use it against you . . . if one doesn't want to break up but one does, the one that doesn't want to could be like, well, if you break up with me, I'm gonna share these. Because I know a couple who have recently just split up from a two-year relationship and that's exactly what's happening between them.

Shifting contexts contributed to participants' perceptions of risk. However, ethically they emphasized the original sexting context. They constructed sexting recipients as having an obligation not to share because they should adhere to the norms applicable to the original context. However, the actions of the subject were interrogated. Jessie (15, F) separated victims into "deserving" or "undeserving" based on their actions. She raised a scenario in which the subject cheats on his or her partner who then distributes images as revenge. She considered the victim more culpable than if he or she had not cheated. If the context changes (e.g., there is a breakup), participants assessed whether the distributor should honor the original context norms. If they considered the subject to have violated the meanings and standards they hold, such as those regarding cheating, that person was blamed and the distributor was not held to the standards of the original sharing context.

Beyond the committed relationship construct, participants queried how individuals can reasonably expect another to share their norms and not have other norms that promote distribution. Participants believed that these victims of privacy violations are to blame for failing to establish trust. They constructed a hierarchy of relationships in which "promiscuity" and "casual encounters" were defined by a lack of trust and, therefore, as inherently risky. Sexting with, for example, someone an individual has just met or is interested in but not in a relationship with was considered foolish and the subject as responsible for harmful consequences:

Interviewer: What if they weren't in a relationship, what if they'd only just met? So, the trust is a little bit more. . . .

Ben (16, M): Idiots.

Interviewer: Is that a different kind of reaction?

John (17, M): Both parties are stupid for sending a picture.

Tom (17, M): They're both taking a risk and if the risk doesn't pay off, then.

Participants struggled to conceive of a legitimate reason for sexting in these contexts. Bodily and sexual expression was qualified, and only in committed relationships did participants believe that there was a legitimate reason to sext. It was, therefore, both a perceived failure to manage the risk of privacy violations and a lack of a "right" to sext in these contexts that sat lower on the hierarchy of relationships. There was no moral or ethical basis on which to critique privacy violations as there was with sexting in committed relationships:

I'd say it's . . . something between a boyfriend and girlfriend . . . something intimate . . . then it's okay . . . it shows like you trust each other enough to do that. . . . But . . . if it's someone you don't really know really well, then I don't really see the point in it. . . . I'm not sure, you don't really know what they're gonna do with that picture. And . . . you don't know if you can trust them and everything. But, I'm not really sure. I don't really understand when strangers do it. . . . I guess maybe they don't have anyone to do it with in real life. (Lily, 17, F)

Participants' judgments about legitimate sexual behavior and approved sexting contexts were heteronormative. John (17, M) described sexting as no longer as big deal as "[at this age] . . . we're meant to be having sex now." However, the context in which sex should take place was circumscribed. Karaian and Van Meyl (2015) suggest that "normal" sexual behavior and desire are located within heterosexual committed relationships that fulfill a particular trajectory and set of social standards, whereas pleasure and desire in other contexts, including more casual encounters, are discounted and defined as risky. There was, therefore, a connection between participants' taken-for-granted constructions of risk management and culturally approved forms of sex, sexuality, and bodily and sexual expression.

Gender and Privacy

These regulatory discourses fell more on young women than young men. Participants' perception that young people will breach one another's privacy for social gain in an absence of "trust" was gendered:

I guess some boys, like, they don't really think about the impacts of it, they just want what's best for them and they really don't think about how it might make you feel. (Naomi, 15, F)

Participants were cognizant that the risk of privacy violations was not evenly distributed. As Naomi's comment above suggests, participants considered young women particularly vulnerable to privacy violations. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Ringrose et al., 2012), participants discussed a culture of entitlement among young men to view and take pleasure in the images of young women, regardless of the original sharing context (Setty, 2018). The young men described this as about keeping up with the "fashion" (Simon, 15, M), being able to say "I have been able to see this person nude" (Andy, 16, M), and so as "not to miss out on anything" (John, 17, M). They constructed this desire as a "natural male reaction" (John) and a typical practice within male peer groups. They distinguished their roles as viewers and bystanders, ethically, by insisting that viewing is not as bad as "sharing it out" (Bond, 18, M). By being "up for a look" (Bond), they saw themselves as taking advantage of what was on offer, without being implicated in harm. This was despite Hasinoff's (2015) suggestion that it is the market of willing viewers that provides a facilitating context for unauthorized distribution.

Young women, meanwhile, tended to be denied a right to "legitimate sexuality" (Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Setty, 2018). Given this lack of legitimacy and the perceived high likelihood of privacy violations affecting young women, participants tasked young women with managing the supposed inherent sexuality and desire of young men, and abstaining from sexting to avoid the risk of privacy violations (see

Angelides, 2013; Gill, 2012; Karaian, 2013; Lee et al., 2013). It was young women who were considered to have the most to lose from privacy violations and participants considered it unrealistic, given the currency their images hold for young men in the peer group (see Ringrose et al., 2012), for them to have expectations of privacy. Participants felt that young women who engaged in sexting despite this terrain of risk were responsible for experiences of harm, whereas young men were doing no more than expected of them as naturally desiring, "hormonal," and "sex-driven" subjects.

Participants' denial of privacy rights to most young people—essentially it was just young men who sext in relationships who were given a right to sext as young women were considered at risk regardless—underpinned victim blaming. Victim blaming involves emphasizing the behavior and responsibility of the victim (Salter, Crofts, & Murray, 2013). Participants considered those without a "right" to sext as entirely to blame or, perhaps, an "undeserving victim." They cast aside the "wrongness" of unauthorized distribution and argued that individuals should expect it and take the required steps to protect themselves. The gender inequality that underpinned unauthorized distribution was taken for granted, and among the majority of participants, harm was not central to their critique. Even those more critical of harm tended to construct it as inevitable, and therefore incumbent on individuals to avoid. They constructed it "easy" for young women to "just say no" to pushy young men and, if they did so, the "problem" of unauthorized distribution would be resolved.

Drawing lines around deserving and undeserving victims was grounded, therefore, in long-standing heteronormativity and gendered meanings surrounding risk and responsibility in sex and sexuality. Participants drew on established systems of meaning to specify the standards they believed victims should reach, while distancing themselves personally from risk. This enabled them to exclude "undeserving victims" from the usual considerations of fairness. They considered the harm of unauthorized distribution less important than individuals' "realistic" entitlement to privacy (see Opatow, 1990; Phoenix & Oerton, 2005). Participants described the negative consequences arising from unauthorized distribution—bullying, abuse, and harassment in the peer group—as "damaging" and "unfair," but incumbent on victims to avoid (Hasinoff, 2015). Some felt that abuse in the peer group could act as a form of "social punishment" for getting it wrong. These participants felt that sexters could learn what is appropriate so as to not "make the same mistake again" (Adam, 15, M):

Pros they will learn from it and won't do it again, cons they may get affected by it for the rest of their life. . . . I mean, at the end of the day . . . we all get punished, like for anything, we can go to prison or something, but if you think about it, people get sent to prison to learn from their mistakes, and learn not to do it again. So, I think that if they do get bullied or something, at the end of the day they will learn from their mistakes and will be like, I'm never gonna do that again. (Chris, 16, M)

Participants considered victim blaming justified when the sexter failed to adhere to approved standards of individualized risk management by engaging in "deviant" forms of sexual expression that have no rights to privacy or protection from harm (Hasinoff, 2017). The social policing of sexting may explain why trust was present in participants' constructions. The peer reaction can be unforgiving and cruel, so individuals were expected to have learned that sexting is only really "safe" if they trust the person to share

and abide by their norms regarding keeping the information private. Participants described having learned this from vicarious and, for some, personal experiences of unauthorized distribution:

When people did it when I was younger, it was . . . more of a game. Everyone just . . . discovered that it was something you could . . . do and everyone just started doing it, and I don't think anyone . . . realized the implications of it. . . . But as we grew up . . . it became more frowned upon to . . . do it. Everyone . . . grew up and matured, and realized what it actually is, and how dangerous it could be . . . if it got leaked and everything. Like especially because it happened . . . I think I begun to realize like everyone else, a few years after it . . . started that you shouldn't . . . do it to someone you . . . don't know very well or whatever. It should always be someone you trust, if at all. (Lily, 17, F)

The risks young people face in sexting created meaning for some participants. Some young women spoke about sexting being a way to express trust and intimacy because of the risks they face. In other words, they considered sexting meaningful because it communicates to the recipient that the sender is entrusting the recipient with something that could have potentially significant social consequences if the sext were ever "exposed" (see Borum, 2010; Misztal, 2012). These young women emphasized sexting being about intimacy and trust regardless of context:

Skye-Rose (16, F): For me, like I think that's really, really personal. . . . I know from experience that it has been shared around but it should still be like. . . .

Riley (16, F): It's intimate.

Skye-Rose: And it's like between two people.

These participants were less restrictive in their attributions of responsibility to the victim, but there remained some standards victims must meet. Rosie (17, F), for example, explained that trust and intimacy need not require a committed relationship, but victims need to have believed they could trust the person. So long as sexting is about communication of trust, they considered it legitimate. Presumably, however, similar to other participants, other motivations (e.g., relating to a spontaneous expression of desire) may not be considered legitimate (Karaian & Van Meyl, 2015; Youdell, 2005).

Interviewer: What about, say, if they hadn't really been in a relationship, if they'd only known each other for a bit, she sent pictures to him?

Rosie: She should have thought a little bit harder about how much she trusts him, but at the same time, if she did think she could trust him, then it's not really her fault. But only if she thinks that she did.

Such emphasis was also apparent among some of the LGBT+ participants. Those identifying as nonheterosexual or nongender conforming discussed the additional level of risk they face in sexting, in which unauthorized distribution can lead to social shaming for being LGBT+. To them, sexting was a powerful indicator of trust, and they perceived LGBT+ sexting contexts as inherently more trustworthy because of the risks they face. Although these participants were less restrictive in how they accorded privacy rights, they were operating within a sociocultural context in which attitudes toward privacy were shaped by

restrictive norms and standards regarding bodily and sexual expression. It was this context that shaped these participants' perceptions of the inherent intimate nature of sexting and gave meaning to the practice.

Conclusion

There was a tentative dialogue emerging from young people's discussions in which individuals were accorded privacy rights and unauthorized distribution was challenged, but it was restrictive. These young people made normative judgments about legitimate sexual and bodily expression, which shaped their attributions of blame and responsibility for privacy violations. Attributions of blame and responsibility were, therefore, less inherent to technology generally or sexting specifically, but to broader social meanings and cultural norms. The contribution of this article is in revealing the taken-for-granted constructs of privacy in digital communication technology that underpinned perceptions of risk and the youth sexual and relational culture that shaped how participants accorded (and denied) privacy rights to sexters.

Privacy violations acted as cautionary tales to participants. The act of producing and sharing an image was defined as the "risky act" (see Karaian, 2013). Images of young people can become "property" of the peer group, in which blame is accorded in line with long-standing gendered and heteronormative standards. The normalization of male entitlement to women's bodies worked alongside a shaming of women who engage in sexual and bodily expression and, therefore, a lack of sympathy toward young women who do not "say no." To be characterized as entitled to privacy required individuals to adhere to standards around feminine modesty and restraint (Karaian, 2013). My participants gave little right to bodily and sexual expression that inherently deserved protection from harm, in comparison to Hasinoff and Shepherd's (2014) participants. However, whereas Hasinoff and Shepherd's participants accorded more rights to intimacy and privacy, they, similar to my participants, responsibilized victims for choosing to sext and there was an emphasis on the best risk management as being not to share.

Although participants' constructions of risk management were abstract, these occurred within a context in which risk was not evenly distributed. Unauthorized distribution, and the social shaming that follows, was based on an on-going objectification of women and delegitimization of women's sexuality (Hasinoff, 2017; Henry & Powell, 2015). Heteronormative constructions of the "ideal context" for sexual and bodily expression, connection, and intimacy intersected with these gendered obligations to avoid harm. "Risk" is, therefore, not "abstract" but occurs within broader power structures, in which individualized forms of risk management are insufficient to addressing the nature and etiology of harm (see Hasinoff, 2015; Marwick et al., 2017; Vickery, 2015). Participants' pervasive individualism thus worked to reflect and reinforce broader social inequalities and power differentials.

The denial of rights and legitimacy justifies privacy violations as "inevitable" and facilitates the peer bonding, consumption of bodies, and social shaming that follow. Debatin (2011) suggests that what is needed is an ethical justification of privacy based on morals (i.e., of privacy having value for the individual and broader society) rather than being context-specific (and, therefore, easy to deny based on the actions or characteristics of the individual). He argues that this includes a right to self-determination—part of autonomy and freedom—that represents a "right that enables individuals to control access to their private sphere and to regulate the flow and context of their information" (p. 51). He contends that privacy violations

should be measured against ethical concepts of autonomy, self-determination, and self-fulfillment for the individual and society rather than the behavior of the victim.

Debatin's (2011) conceptualization is quite removed from most participants' constructions of privacy. Interventions should, therefore, expose the restrictive, individualistic norms and meanings that shape youth sexting culture and encourage more collective orientations to privacy in which individuals have a duty not to harm others regardless of context (see Livingstone & Third, 2017). Dobson and Ringrose (2015) suggest, however, that young people's attributions of responsibility for harm re-create the messages contained in many campaign and educational materials directed toward them. Their constructions of privacy are contextualized by a broader educational and legal context that seeks to circumscribe their practices and rests on a set of racialized, gendered, and heteronormative meanings regarding the "inevitability" of privacy violations (see Albury, 2017; Albury & Crawford, 2012; Crofts et al., 2015; Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Döring, 2014; Karaian, 2013).

Hasinoff (2017) argues that what is needed are "antiprivacy violation" messages rather than "antisexting" messages. Antisexting messages risk reinforcing the notion that victims are to blame, and the associated narratives of risk and shame may prevent young people seeking help when harmed (see Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016). The emphasis should, instead, be on relegitimizing different bodies and sexualities and challenging young people's tendency toward individualized risk management. Such aims may be difficult to achieve, as Lamb and Randazzo (2016) found in their research with 13- to 16-year-olds. Their participants constructed personal responsibility as central to risk and exploitation as likely, and although there was some acknowledgment of social conditions, any discourse of wider responsibilities was crowded out by individual responsibility.

Education with young people should, therefore, be proactive and encourage young people to discuss issues relating to sex, gender, and sexuality, including in their digital cultures, and to connect their practices and experiences with broader social inequalities and injustices (see Albury, 2013; Renold, 2013). A risk-oriented approach to education on youth sexting may limit space for more critical and open dialogue, but Albury's (2013) research with providers of sex education suggests that media can personalize, make real sexual identities and experiences, and can be a tool for learning. In this sense, youth sexting is not something that can just be "solved" through technology. As much as young people may be adapting to the affordances of digital communication technology, my research revealed that sexting as a practice and a cultural phenomenon involves the importation of offline norms and meanings regarding gender, sexuality, and relationships (see Buckingham, 2008; Cooper, Green, Murtagh, & Harper, 2002; Hodkinson, 2015). Sexting can, therefore, be used as a platform for learning about norms surrounding relationships, sex, rights, responsibilities, ethics, and justice.

Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

The sample was fairly homogeneous, particularly in terms of ethnic background. Although, perhaps, understandable given the region of England in which the study was carried out, this limits the applicability of the findings. Generalizability is not conventionally a primary aim of qualitative research; however, the findings should be considered representative of the views, experiences, and youth cultural position of this

particular group of young people. How young people navigate privacy and the norms and meanings shaping their constructions may differ between youth cultural perspectives. Ultimately, the value of this study is in revealing how youth sexting is located within a cultural context. Individualistic, abstract conceptualizations of risk and risk management are contextualized by broader social meanings and cultural norms in which commonsense, taken-for-granted constructions of risk reproduce broader inequalities and power structures. The findings suggest that it is important to identify and deconstruct the systems of meaning underpinning young people's perceptions and practices. As the variance of this context may differ between young people, further research exploring how different groups construct risk of privacy violations in sexting and the inequalities shaping their constructions would, therefore, be of value.

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